

AN
ANALYSIS OR OUTLINE,
OF THE
Life and Character
OF
JOSIAH BURNHAM ;

WHO WAS SENTENCED TO DEATH, AT THE SUPREME COURT, HOLDEN AT PLYMOUTH, ON THE 4TH TUESDAY OF MAY, 1806,—AND WHOSE EXECUTION WAS TO HAVE TAKEN PLACE AT HAVERHILL, THE 15TH OF JULY FOLLOWING, BUT REPRIEVED BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR, WITH ADVICE OF THE HON. COUNCIL, TO THE 12TH OF AUGUST ; FOR THE MURDER OF RUSSELL FREEMAN AND JOSEPH STARKWEATHER,—WHICH OCCURRENCE TOOK PLACE, AT HAVERHILL GAOL, ON THE 17TH OF DECEMBER, 1805.

COMMUNICATED BY HIMSELF.

"But man dieth, and wasteth away ; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he ?" JOB, XIV. 10.


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LIFE AND CHARACTER OF JOSIAH BURNHAM.

I JOSIAH BURNHAM, was born in Farmington, in the State of Connecticut, on the 12th day of August, 1743 ; I received a common English education, and acquired some knowledge of the Latin language. At the age of 15 years I left my studies, and enlisted into the French war, as it was called, though under Great-Britain and the American colonies ; where I continued for three seasons, undergoing many hardships and difficulties in defence of my infant country. After my return, and in the 18th year of my age, I entered as an attendant and clerk in a store, in which employ I continued constantly for three years, except taking one voyage to the West-Indies, giving complete satisfaction to my employer. I then returned to my father's in Connecticut, where I continued about one year. From thence I set out for New-Jersey, and was there engaged as a teacher in an English school for six years, without any remarkable occurrence happening. On my return to Connecticut, I had an inclination to try the Whale-fishery ; accordingly the summer following, at the age of 26, I went to Nantucket, in Massachusetts, where I engaged in the business of my inclination. Soon after I was employed, we fitted and set sail, proceeded on our expedition, passed to the banks of Newfoundland, where we made a stand for a few days, refitted and recreated ourselves by fishing, which was really an amusement, as fish were very plenty around these banks. We then continued on our voyage to the Islands of Zoar,* making very successful attacks on whales, which were the principal objects of our pursuit. After having satisfactory success we returned, being on our voyage five months and fifteen days. On the winter following, I resumed my former occupation of school-keeping, in my native town and

* *Seven Islands off Spain.*

district,

district, where I again became one of my father's family. In March following, having become acquainted with the use of the compass and the theory of surveying, I was determined to reduce it to practice, as I thought it would be interesting to myself, as well as to settlers in new countries;—accordingly, I received recommendations from three gentlemen, who were well known to the President of Dartmouth College (Mr. Wheelock) to whom they recommended me. I immediately set out for Hanover, and on my arrival there, the President received me very politely, and offered me two rights of land lying in Landaff, if I would superintend a settlement there; but the town being chartered for the support of the college before named, and no settlement made therein, I declined accepting his proposals, and continued my journey to Newbury, Vermont, where I soon found myself overrun in business, and my property rapidly increasing. I continued in the business of surveying upward of one year, and finding it rather fatiguing, and being tired of a single life, I married to *Betsy Chase*, a supposed widow, about my age, which was a little over 29 years; immediately after my marriage we heard from her former husband, but he being married again, the news gave me satisfaction.—In the year 1777, I began a settlement in Coventry, in the State of New-Hampshire, and built the first house in the town, and, from a vote of the proprietors (who lived in the south part of Connecticut) I put on ten settlers, who were the first in the town. After having lived there about 19 years, my house accidentally took fire and consumed, together with most of my household furniture, bedding, &c. I then removed to Haverhill, where I have lived ever since.

Having now given a short sketch of my life, I will endeavor to show my readers, under the following heads, 1st my TEMPER and DISPOSITION.—2d. ABUSES.—3d. CONFINEMENT.—4th. CRIMINALITIES.—5th. TRIAL,—and close with some OBSERVATIONS, &c.

1st. TEMPER AND DISPOSITION.

In my TEMPER and DISPOSITION, from my “youth upwards,” nothing remarkable happened until I had many
abuses

abuses heaped upon me; and, I always had an easy government over the two faculties; but after misfortunes and abuses increased upon me (*as you will see under the next head*) my temper and disposition began to be changed—my temper became quick and furious—my disposition *remarkably changed*, and *not* for the better.

2d. ABUSES.

To show some of the principal ABUSES, which I have suffered, I shall now proceed. One Samuel Atkinson, whom I thought a friend to me, found I had taken bonds for a large quantity of wild lands, came and told me that he should see the proprietors in a few days, and he would take the bonds, and get the deeds from them for me, if it would oblige me; I answered it would very much, and accordingly I wrote to the proprietors to this purport,—“Gentlemen please to give the deeds to Samuel Atkinson and receive your bonds from him, and it will save me trouble and expense.” From these lines Atkinson took the advantage, and made the proprietors believe that he had bought the bonds of me, and had the deeds running to him, and recorded in his own name, which immediately broke our friendship, and involved us in the law for upwards of fourteen years; but after much trouble and expense, I recovered judgment against the said Atkinson, and he not being fully satisfied brought many vexatious suits against me, which made me much expense, shamefully abused my character, and finally, reduced both of our properties to a very low ebb.—After these transactions, the said Atkinson was committed to gaol as a debtor, and there ended his days.

Another circumstance of abuse happened to me, which I think proper to notice.—One evening I called at the store of John Montgomery,* and falling into company with some of the towns-people, who did not perfectly agree in sentiment with me, some small dispute arose, and after considerable debate, anger ensued, and one man, *whom I shall not name for my honor*, took a knife and cut my clothes in many places.

* In Haverhill.

places. From this circumstance I left the store, and took my way towards home. Before I had gone far I was tripped up by a rope being laid across the road and very much hurt, and shouts of laughter were heard around me; however, I got up again, and went on, but before long I was again headed, and used in the same manner, at which they redoubled their snickers. From this abuse I was not able to perform any business for about eighteen months.—Who will not judge this an abuse? After being stunned by two heavy falls on the ice—dragged by my heels some distance, and then fouled into a cold pond of water and there left senseless. Is not this abuse? O shame! I now forgive you all; but remember your guilt!—This I record as a fact, which actually happened to me in February, 1803.

I will only mention two more abuses, which are of a nature, rather singular, and then pass on to the next head, leaving many intermediate ones behind, though as worthy of publication as either of the foregoing.—One evening in the autumn of 1805, a number of “evil minded persons” came as a mob to my house, and ordered myself and housekeeper out doors, there being nobody within but us; (*my wife having left me, with whom I had lived about 32 years, on account of some trifling dispute, concerning property, which fell to her by one of her connexions, which she refused to let me share any advantage from*)—Some of the mob entered the house-top and began to strip the boards off, while many were on the ground using their faculties there, and in a short time the house was laid principally on the ground. The mob then retired with a huzza! The mob consisted of about fifteen persons I should judge, but I am not certain what number it did contain. I concluded I knew some of the heads of the party, but I shall refrain from calling names in these my last hours.—*This abuse I also suffered at Haverhill.*

The other abuse, with which I shall conclude this head, is what I received from the two persons, whom I MURDERED, and for which crime I am now under the sentence of DEATH!—From my first acquaintance with Mr. Freeman, he appeared to be a very sensible man, and agreeable in conversation, but rather rigid in his principles, and abusive in his temper; how-
ever,

OF JOSIAH BURNHAM.

ever, I had no great difficulty with him, until Mr. Starkweather was committed ; they in a short time became very much linked together, and having, to appearance, a particular fondness for each other ; and whatever one advocated the other was certain to do. I was different in many of my sentiments from them, which kept a continual bubble of dispute on all our arguments, and often my temper would rise to that degree, that I found it ungovernable. On the 17th of December, about 11 o'clock in the forenoon, a very severe contest arose, about some uncivil conversation, from which we went from words to blows ;—the contest became so hot, and feeling myself very much abused, I called to Mr. Corliss, the gaoler, for assistance, who soon came, commanded us to be peaceable, and withdrew from the door, in expectation that we should not quarrel any more, as he left us less noisy than he found us ; but in a few minutes I had occasion to call for further assistance from Mr. Corliss, who answered “ be still, I will hear no more of your *peramble* ”—however, the contest increased instead of abating, and continued until about 8 o'clock in the evening ; and, my anger being raised above my senses, I wreaked my vengeance upon them, which put an end to their existence !*

3d. CONFINEMENT.

My confinement is of course the next head, which I proposed to write under.—Before I was imprisoned on any criminal action, my abuses and misfortunes brought upon me a very long and tedious confinement, on account of the loss of my property ; I was confined to the limits of the gaol-yard in Haverhill, about six years ; after which, I was confined to close gaol as a debtor, until the 17th of December last, as you will see under the *preceding head* ; since that time I have been closely confined and in hand-cuffs, undergoing all the horrors of guilt, for the heinous crime, under which I now stand sentenced to die.

“ Oh, vile wretch ! can I pretend,

“ God’s my Father and my friend ?”

4th.

* Perhaps another MURDER, of the like kind, was never known.

4th. CRIMINALITIES.

The next head in succession, *as you see*, is my *criminalities*; many I have been accused of, but guilty of few.—The first criminal action I have ever committed, *as I call it*, is that of “profane *curfing* and *swearing*,” which I have been very much addicted to, from my childhood;—I early began to rove in different countries, and I found it a common practice prevailing in almost every part where I travelled, particularly in the army and on board of vessels, where I believe I imbibed within me this shameful vice.—Another crime which I shall endeavor to advance an idea upon, which I have been guilty of, is, “fornication and adultery;” this is a very shameful vice indeed! and against the “commands of God,” and though I believe millions to be guilty of this vice in a tenfold proportion to myself, it atoneth not for me; for it is written, “he that offendeth in one point is guilty of all.”—I shall now proceed to my capital crime MURDER! of which I am guilty.—Russell Freeman and Joseph Starkweather, were confined in the Prison at Haverhill, in the same room with me, and all as debtors, where the horrid catastrophe took place; O, horrid to relate! A man, almost sixty three years of age, drew a knife in anger, shed the blood, and took the life of two brother prisoners! Who can behold my guilt and forgive? Alas, I received many abuses from my two brothers, but I heartily admonish every one to “govern his temper,” and forgive, rather than commit a SIN.

5th. TRIAL.

I now proceed to my TRIAL.—I was taken out of the gaol at Haverhill on the 28th of May, 1806, and carried to Plymouth, and after the usual time allowed by law, for me to prepare for trial, I was arraigned before the bar, with fifteen and an half pounds of iron about me, Judges Smith, Wingate and Livermore, presiding. After undergoing an impartial trial, wherein I plead *not guilty*; the Jury retired for a few minutes and returned with their verdict, GUILTY—Judge Smith then arose, and pronounced the awful sentence of Death!!

OBSERVATIONS.

OBSERVATIONS, &c.

I have now arrived close to the brink ! About to launch into eternity, and take my passage either to the world of happiness or misery !—Therefore, a few OBSERVATIONS will not be improper. It is a little remarkable, that the day appointed for my execution, (*August 12, 1806*) will carry me to the age of sixty three years. I have run the rounds of business, pleasure and trouble ; I have done with them all—I prize them at their real value, which is very low ; whereas those, who are not experienced, always over-rate them. When I reflect back, upon what I have seen, heard and done, I can hardly persuade myself that all the bustle and pleasure of the world had any reality. Shall I tell you that I bear my dreadful situation with fortitude and resignation ? No, I bear it because I must bear it, whether I will or no.—I have beheld horror and guilt ! I have seen supernatural phenomena ! or imagination has deceived me.—I saw on the 10th of April last, about 11 o'clock in the evening, a bright circle, appear at my bed-side, encompassed apparently with silver borders, alternately wide and narrow, wherein I beheld three faces of the fairest features and complexion. This I saw before I went to sleep that night, and communicated it to several the next morning ; I supposed and believed it to be an allusion of the *Godhead*, the FATHER, SON and HOLY GHOST, sitting therein.—In about two months after, I beheld, at the grates of the Prison, in my room, a globe, transparently clear, in the centre of which, appeared a red spot like scarlet it reflected through the whole, a reddish color, but more bright at the top part, than at the bottom. This I concluded to be the type of *Hell*.—*These I should judge lasted about two minutes each, and then vanished.*

Now, to you, my readers, give ear to the words of a dying man ! Astonishing to conceive ! I have spent almost sixty-three years in sin and rebellion against God ! and I feel not forgiven ! My transgressions are many, and “ the ways of transgressors hard.” Although at times I receive favors from the throne of Grace, yet, I do not think my peace made with God ! Let this sad and awful circumstance

be a warning to all, both old and young, and remind them to "be up and doing," lest the night of death overtake them, and they perish in their sins!

I am soon to appear before a large concourse of spectators, according to the sentence passed on me, and at the place of my final exit, as I expect—O, what a most shocking sight it must be to my beholders! To see a man, grown bald and gray with old age, launched into eternity in an instant, as it were, and to "appear before the final Judge of both the quick and dead," and there to receive his sentence, either in these animating words, "come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,"—or, in these awful words, "depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Let me now caution you all, I conjure you, not to adhere to the false doctrines, now prevailing in many parts of our land, but to the sacred truths, which are written in the Old and New Testament;—and, may God add his blessing to you all, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

"I go, I fly, and vanish from this life."

F I N I S.

☞ I return my sincere thanks to those Gentlemen of the Clergy, who have visited me since my confinement, and for their services ; and also to other Gentlemen, who have favored me with visits, &c. and to Mr. Corliss, the gaoler, and his family, for their kind attention.

* * The Public may, “ by leave of divine Providence,” expect a few pages, on my Religious sentiment, and my *extraordinary changes*, &c.

